



**Written Support of House Bill 5216, An Act Concerning Utility Termination
For Households With A Member Less Than Twenty Four Months Old**

Testimony of Sarah Schlegel, MD
Connecticut Children's Medical Center

My name is Dr. Sarah Schlegel and I am the Medical Director of the Hartford Medical-Legal Partnership Project (MLPP). The MLPP is a medical-legal collaborative that improves the health of children and their families and is located on site at hospitals and medical clinics in the greater Hartford area.

I practice at Connecticut Children's Medical Center where I serve as an attending physician in the Division of Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics. I received my undergraduate degree in neuroscience and behavior at Wesleyan University and my medical degree at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. Upon graduation from residency in pediatrics at Stony Brook University Hospital on Long Island, I completed a fellowship in Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics at Yale University.

The passage of HB 5216 is essential for the health, safety, and developmental well-being of Connecticut's youngest residents. The medical documentation is clear that no child under two years of age should live in a dwelling without heat or electricity. Children under two years of age must live in a thermally neutral environment. Infants and toddlers have an immature physiological capacity for thermoregulation that makes them more vulnerable to extreme variations of in ambient temperatures than older individuals. Published in the October 2008 edition of the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Cook et al. stated that "under extreme temperature conditions, these differences in thermoregulation can contribute to adverse child health outcomes, such as higher rates of hospitalization, and increase in neurodevelopmental and psychological disturbances" (A brief indicator of household energy and security: Associations with food security, child health, and child development in US infants and toddlers, *Pediatrics*, 122, e867-e875).

Studying data collected regarding nearly 10,000 infants and toddlers, Cook et al. found that children who live in households lacking heat or electricity are at higher risk of injury from the use of "alternative" heat sources. Use of gas stoves for heat results in exposure to carbon monoxide and upper respiratory illnesses, pot-boiled water as a hot water source (when gas hot water has been terminated) results in burns, and candles for light (when the electricity has been terminated) results in burns and other devastation. Significantly, the study reported that infants and toddlers are the demographic who are at the highest risk of death from home candle fires.

Connecticut now has the opportunity to fill a gap in the existing law. Currently in Connecticut, in households where a member has a life threatening condition, a physician can certify that this individual's life will be put at risk if there is no heat or electricity. This certification is solely based on medical diagnosis, not at all on household income. The same holds true for HB 5216, as the life of every infant and toddler in households without heat or electricity would be put at considerable medical risk – this bill must be passed so that all of Connecticut's children under twenty four months of age will be protected from heat and electricity termination. Without these protections, our children will sustain and suffer from neurological, developmental, and psychological damage. As a community facing enormous challenges, we have an opportunity in the passing of this bill to improve the quality of young children's lives and halt this particular drain on our medical and human services systems.